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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to assess residence hall student attitudes toward student-athletes at a predominantly white, eastern public institution. A total of 180 students living in traditional residence halls, suites, and apartments were sent the Situational Attitude Scale--Student-Athlete of whom 115 returned usable responses. Results showed that students felt more jealous, resentful, suspicious, and indignant toward a "student-athlete" than toward a student who has an expensive sports car. They felt more sad, disapproving, concerned, worried, and annoyed when a "student-athlete" is assigned to be their lab partner. They indicated they were more suspicious, disapproving, embarrassed, and disappointed when a "student-athlete" as opposed to a student in the room next door leaves school. Females had more positive attitudes than males in such situations as (1) a group of students or student-athletes fighting at a local bar, or, (2) a student or student-athlete being charged with destruction of property, or, (3) being assigned a student athlete as a lab partner. Attitude differences have major implications for residence life staff in the areas of advising, training, and programming. The survey instrument and 17 references are included. (JDD)

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This study was conducted with the cooperation of the Department of Resident Life, University of Maryland at College Park. Computer time was also generously provided by the Computer Science Center, University of Maryland at College Park

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## SUMMARY

Questions about academic competence, scandalous and violent behavior of student-athletes have been of interest to both researchers and the popular media. The present study was designed to assess the attitudes of residence hall students toward student-athletes at UMCP.

It was found that residents perceived student-athletes negatively in situations dealing with the acquisition of material goods and academic competency issues. Results are discussed in terms of advising, training, and programming.

# Attitudes of Residence Hall Students Toward Student- Athletes: Implications for Advising, Training, and Programming

In recent years, intercollegiate competition has been a topic of controversy and scrutiny among college officials, students, student-athletes, and the media. Questions about academic competence, scandalous and violent behavior of student-athletes have been the subject of both researchers and the popular media. "Crime tarnishing college athletics" (Lee, 1989) and "Foul!" (Updike, 1989) are examples of feature article titles that highlight on-going themes associated with big-time college sports and its participants. The "dumb jock" stereotype for student-athletes is an imagery still alive on college campuses (Zingg, 1982).

College is a critical period for establishing a sense of competence and identity (Chickering, 1969). However, student- athletes are vulnerable to major identify confusion (Golden, 1984). Players are both admired and resented by the college community (Leach & Conners, 1984). The ability of student-athletes to develop a healthy, stable self-concept is threatened

when the environment sends messages to members of this special population that they demonstrate abnormal intellectual and social patterns. Recognizing the attitudes of the groups that interact frequently with student-athletes is critical to understanding the environmental factors contributing to the self-concept of student-athletes.

The present study was conducted in order to assess residence hall student attitudes toward student-athletes at a predominantly White, eastern public institution. In Education and Identity (Chickering, 1969), the student culture and residence hall arrangements are two of the five environmental conditions identified that influence the development of students. Chickering states "Development in the residence hall settings stem from two major sources: close friendships and concomitant reference groups, and the general attitudes and values carried by the house as a cultural entity (p. 152)." Student-athletes are given feedback from day to day associations with the student culture. These associations have an effect on how successfully student-athletes will address several vectors identified by Chickering; namely identity, purpose, freeing interpersonal relationships, intellectual competency, and autonomy (Chickering, 1969). A study that explores the

attitudes held by peers that live in close proximity to student-athletes may offer valuable implications for practice for residence life and student affairs professionals.

## Method

### Participants

One hundred and eighty participants living in traditional residence halls, suites and apartments were selected randomly and sent the Situational Attitude Scale- Student-Athlete. One hundred and twenty five surveys were returned (70 %) which included 10 surveys from student-athletes. These surveys were not included in the analysis. 42% of the sample lived in traditional halls; 48 % lived in suites or apartments.

### Instrument

All participants were randomly assigned to complete either Form 1 or Form 2 of the Situational Attitude Scale- Student-Athlete. The SAS was developed to measure the attitudes of students toward student-athletes in a context that made psychological withdrawal difficult (Sedlacek and Brooks, 1970). The SAS format is intended to circumvent the problem of offering socially desirable responses (Carter, White & Sedlacek, 1987). It is designed so that the student-athlete variable is difficult to avoid.

The SAS contains a series of social and personal situations followed by ten bi-polar adjectives (e.g. happy-sad) for each situation. Participants are requested to indicate reactions to the situations by checking a point on a five point scale that best describes their feelings (See Exhibit 1).

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Insert Exhibit 1 about here

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The only difference between Form 1 and 2 is that Form 2 contains the words "student-athlete" and Form 1 contains only the word "student." It is assumed, therefore, that any mean response differences can be attributed to differing perceptions of students and student-athletes; or in other words, differing attitudes toward student and student-athletes participating in identical behaviors. Differences were analyzed using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) at the .05 level.

The SAS design also has been used to demonstrate attitudes toward groups other than student-athletes. It has been shown to be a valid measure of student attitudes toward male sex roles (Hirt, Hoffman & Sedlacek, 1983); Blacks (Carter, White & Sedlacek, 1987); Arabs (Sergent, Woods & Sedlacek, 1989); women (Minatoya and Sedlacek,

1983); older people (Schwalb and Sedlacek, 1990); and Hispanics (White and Sedlacek, 1987).

## Results

For the remainder of this article, the term "student" will refer to those students who do not compete in competitive athletics.

### Form Differences

The overall MANOVA showed significant differences between Forms 1 and 2 in three out of the ten situations.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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In Situations 5, 6 and 10 students had significantly more negative attitudes toward athletes. Students felt more jealous, resentful, suspicious, and indignant toward a "student-athlete" than a "student" who on their "residence hall floor has an expensive sports car." They expressed that they were more sad, disapproving, concerned, worried, and annoyed when a "student-athlete" is assigned to be their lab partner. Finally they indicated they were more suspicious, disapproving, embarrassed, and disappointed when a "student- athlete" as opposed to a "student" in "the room next door leaves school."

Gender Differences

Females responded significantly differently on 5 out of the 10 situations regardless of form. They had more significant positive attitudes toward (1) a group of students (athletes) getting in a fight at a local bar, (2) a student (athlete) charged with destruction of property, (3) having a female friend who has a blind date with a student (student-athlete), (4) being assigned a lab partner (student-athlete), and (5) hearing of a male student (student-athlete) in your hall who has pushed his date and may have hurt her. Means and standard deviations for these analyses are presented in Table 1.

Gender and Form Interactions

There was no significant difference for the interaction of form and gender (overall MANOVA at .05). However a consistent trend was observed when comparing males and females who completed Form 2 (the form that included "student athlete"). Women who completed the student-athlete form demonstrated attitudes toward student-athletes that were more positive than males who filled out the student-athlete form in 7 out of 10 situations (Situations 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10).

Reliability

Coefficient alphas for Form 1 ranged from .76 to .91 with a median of .85. The coefficient alphas for Form

2 ranged from .73 to .93 with a median of .84.

## Discussion

### Attitudes Toward Student-Athletes

The results indicate that students do react more negatively to student-athletes possessing expensive sports cars. Negative attitudes toward student-athletes possessing expensive sports cars may point to the common stereotype that student-athletes are recipients of extravagant gifts such as cars, money, clothes, etc. The negative attitudes toward being assigned a student athlete as a lab partner are likely related to the belief that athletes' skills do not extend into the classroom.

One might suspect that the significant negative attitudes toward athletes who leave school are also related to the belief that athletes are not academically suited for institutions of higher education. These attitudes do not create a warm or supportive environment for student-athletes in the classroom.

The significant differences of the attitudes of students toward student-athletes have major implications for practice for residence life staff who work with this population; particularly in the areas of (a) advising, (b) training, and (c) programming.

### Advising

Through informal and formal one-on-one contacts, residence life professionals are in an excellent position to contribute to the development of a positive self-image for student-athletes. Residence life practitioners who are aware of the attitudes students may have of student-athletes can attempt to create meaningful opportunities for student-athletes to address and negate the effect of this misinformation.

The findings in this study may be particularly helpful in disciplinary situations. The residence life professional should be aware that some students may quickly assume without due cause that student-athletes are involved in aggressive activities, particularly if student-athletes are anywhere near the "crime scene." Entry-level staff who have more opportunities for informal time with the athletes can also advise them on how to minimize the effect of the attitudes of their peers in the classroom. Some strategies that staff might want to suggest include getting to class early, sitting at the front of the class, raising questions over the readings, having somebody proof their papers, and making friends with someone in the class who is not an athlete (Walter and Siebert, 1987).

Training

Just as residence life staff commit time to educating paraprofessional and professional staff in the examination of their attitudes and behaviors toward members of different ethnic groups, gay/lesbian groups, religious groups, similar opportunities exist regarding the student-athletes. To offer staff examples and data to confront attitudes and to change behaviors would be important elements to include in training programs. Simple anecdotal stories are typically very effective in encouraging staff to reconsider their assumptions about this group (e.g. A football player expressed to a group of student affairs staff that "everyone thinks we drive around in fancy cars; little do they know that twenty of us pitched in money to buy <u>one</u> scooter!"). Staff should be required to confront students who are throwing out allegations about student-athletes without facts, just as they would about misinformation and prejudicial attitudes expressed about other special populations. In addition, since the participants of this study were undergraduate students, it is likely that undergraduate resident advisors hold similar attitudes toward this group. It may be useful to engage these staff in exercises to explore and confront their attitudes. Supervisors should also periodically check that resident advisors are getting to know the student-athletes and not

assume such efforts are being made. If resident advisors are holding onto certain attitudes toward members of this group, these feelings may interfere with their ability to interact in a quality, appropriate manner.

Programming

The findings of this study suggest that educational programs may be in order that provide opportunities for the campus community to challenge their feelings about student-athletes. Social programs that allow athletes and non-athlete students to interact can provide forums for student-athletes to develop healthy peer relationships and foster a positive self-image.

In addition to residence life staff, other campus constituent groups can benefit from learning about the results of this study. Coaches and academic support units often have the closest, most frequent contact with student-athletes. They are in the best position to prepare the student-athletes for the stereotypes held by their student peers.

Faculty should make efforts to structure opportunities for student-athletes to demonstrate their academic achievements in front of their peers. It may be valuable to sponsor faculty development sessions that address ways faculty can support the development of this special population and to allow them to explore some of

their own stereotypes about student-athletes.

Gender Differences

It is also interesting to note the gender differences in this study. Females tended to be more positive, regardless if the stimulus was "student-athlete" or "student" than males about situations that involved aggressive/violent behaviors by students (or student-athletes) (e.g. a group of students get in a fight in a local bar) and those situations that deal with relationships (e.g. being assigned a lab partner; having a female friend who has a blind date).

When the situations make reference to "students" or "student-athletes", one assume they are referring to males. The greater tolerance level of women students for acts of aggressiveness and violence by males is alarming and supports data found in the current literature (Warshaw, 1988). The finding that women students are more positive about situations that involve the establishment of relationships is also consistent with previous studies (Gilligan, 1982; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986).

Future Research Studies

Leach and Connor (1984) contended that negative attitudes toward student-athletes are probably most strongly expressed by faculty. Further studies using the

SAS-student athlete are recommended with this population to substantiate such claims.

Institutional studies offices should share demographic data about the student-athlete so a more accurate portrayal of this group is provided to the campus community.

Additional situations that identify the attitudes toward student-athletes that relate to intellectual competency would be appropriate. Providing forms delineating specific student athlete groups (e.g. male student-athletes, female student-athletes, varsity sport athletes, basketball/football athletes) may also surface significant differences that suggest diverse intervention strategies based on the specific student-athlete group.

Hopefully, the results of this study will encourage student affairs practitioners to engage in additional research about the environmental effects on the self-esteem of college athletes. Such an exploration may surface the need to consider this group as a special population with unique needs, issues, challenges that requires tailored-made intervention strategies.

## Exhibit 1

### INSTRUCTIONS AND SITUATIONS FROM THE SITUATIONAL ATTITUDE SCALE

This questionnaire measures how people think and feel about a number of social and personal incidents and situations. It is not a test so there are no right or wrong answers. The questionnaire is anonymous so please DO NOT SIGN YOUR NAME.

Each item or situation is followed by 10 descriptive word scales. Your task is to select, for each descriptive scale, the rating which best describes YOUR feelings toward the item.

Sample item: starting school this spring

happy A B C D E sad

You would indicate the direction and extent of your feelings, (e.g. you might select "B "by indicating "B" on your response sheet by blackening in the appropriate space for that word scale. DO NOT MARK ON THE BOOKLET. PLEASE RESPOND TO ALL WORD SCALES.

Sometimes you may feel as though you had the same item before on the questionnaire. This will not be the case, so DO NOT LOOK BACK AND FORTH through the items. Do not try to remember how you checked similar items earlier in the questionnaire. MAKE EACH ITEM A SEPARATE AND INDEPENDENT JUDGMENT. Respond as honestly as possible without puzzling over individual items. Respond with your first impressions wherever possible.

SITUATIONS

1. A group of students get in a fight in a local bar.
   A group of student-athletes get in a fight in a local bar.

2. You meet your new roommate.
   You meet your new roommate who is a student- athlete.

3. A student is charged with destruction of property on your residence hall floor.
   A student-athlete is charged with destruction of property on your residence hall floor.

4. You have a female friend who has a blind date.
   You have a female friend who has a blind date with a student-athlete.

5. A student on your residence hall floor has an expensive sports car.
   A student-athlete on your residence hall floor has an expensive sports car.

6. You are assigned a lab partner in a class.
   A student-athlete is assigned to be your lab partner in a class.

7. A student on your floor has been arrested for possession of cocaine.
   A student-athlete on your floor has been arrested for possession of cocaine.

8. You hear of a male student in your hall who pushed his date and may have hurt her.
   You hear of a male student-athlete in your hall who pushed his date and may have hurt her.

9. Someone on your floor always has the stereo up too loud.
   A student-athlete on your floor always has the stereo up too loud.

10. Someone in the room next door leaves school.
    A student-athlete in the room next door leaves school.

Copies of the Situational Attitude Scale- Student Athlete are available from William E. Sedlacek, Counseling Center, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations
Of SAS-Student Athlete Situation Scores

| | Females | | | | Males | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Form 1 (N = 34) | | Form 2 (athlete) (N = 23) | | Form 1 (N = 25) | | Form 2 (athlete) (N = 33) | | |
| *Situation | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | Significant at .05 |
| 1 | 39.47 | 5.49 | 37.12 | 6.12 | 34.56 | 5.19 | 35.50 | 6.30 | G |
| 2 | 36.15 | 8.36 | 34.56 | 7.33 | 32.96 | 6.56 | 34.07 | 7.44 | |
| 3 | 22.65 | 8.47 | 24.33 | 5.69 | 27.07 | 6.67 | 25.12 | 5.11 | G |
| 4 | 33.10 | 4.94 | 32.25 | 5.86 | 27.87 | 6.06 | 30.37 | 5.20 | G |
| 5 | 34.08 | 7.13 | 28.44 | 7.49 | 32.87 | 5.59 | 30.67 | 6.20 | F |
| 6 | 34.94 | 7.74 | 32.52 | 6.79 | 32.15 | 6.52 | 28.63 | 8.07 | F, G |
| 7 | 33.82 | 8.30 | 32.72 | 6.84 | 29.90 | 7.68 | 31.93 | 6.18 | |
| 8 | 16.79 | 6.42 | 20.12 | 7.20 | 23.17 | 9.15 | 20.83 | 8.20 | G |
| 9 | 20.74 | 6.01 | 22.52 | 5.60 | 24.83 | 9.54 | 22.27 | 5.98 | |
| 10 | 33.95 | 8.47 | 30.63 | 5.81 | 32.61 | 7.33 | 30.01 | 4.60 | F |

* See Exhibit 1 for situations

** F = significant effect for Form; G = significant effect for Gender.

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